

# General Charles Cornwallis

By Jane Runyon

---

Charles Cornwallis was English through and through. He was born on the last day of 1738, the first son of the 1st Earl of Cornwallis. As the son of an earl, Charles would have the best opportunities for education and career. He was schooled at Eton and Clare College in Cambridge, England. Following family tradition, he also entered military training and received his first military commission, Ensign, before he reached his 18th birthday.



Charles chose to make the military his career. He served his country in Germany and eventually earned the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. When his father died, he inherited the title of 2nd Earl of Cornwallis. One of his responsibilities as Earl of Cornwallis was to accept a seat in the House of Lords, one of the houses of Parliament. Here he became involved in the politics of the Whigs. The Whigs were a political party in England who did not particularly care for the taxes being imposed on all English citizens. Some of these citizens had moved to a new world across the Atlantic. He was sympathetic to the arguments the colonists were raising to the king.

When the colonists finally declared their independence, it became clear that a war was imminent. Charles Cornwallis was promoted to the rank of Major General and sent to take command of troops in America. He and his troops were able to defeat General George Washington and his rebel army on Long Island in August 1776. As far as the British were concerned, this was just the first victory in the few it would take to settle this uprising. Cornwallis and his troops chased the continentals into New Jersey but stopped when ordered to by his superior, General William Howe.

It was a tradition in the British army to make a camp and stay there during the winter months. Fighting in the snow and cold was not something the military felt necessary. They didn't expect their enemies to fight during the winter, either. This practice was known by George Washington. That is why he chose to attack the British at Trenton, New Jersey, on Christmas Day 1776. This strategy gained the colonials their first major victory in the Revolutionary War. Cornwallis followed Washington and his troops, but he was unable to overtake them.

Cornwallis returned to England for a short time but returned to the colonies with a new promotion, Lieutenant General. He was now second in command of the British troops. He and his troops retreated to New York from Philadelphia. They were able to defeat the Patriots at Monmouth in June 1778. At about this time, Cornwallis' wife became ill, and he returned to England to be with her. She died in 1779.

In August 1779, Cornwallis returned to the colonies and was sent to the southern colonies in an attempt to spread the already thin colonial troops out even farther. He was successful in his campaign at Camden, South Carolina. However, he was soundly defeated at King's Mountain and Cowpens in late 1780 and early 1781. He took what was left of his troops to the coast of Virginia and set up camp at Yorktown. Washington and his men, with the help of the French, were able to surround the British troops in October of 1781. General Charles Cornwallis realized the futility in fighting any longer. His troops surrendered their arms to Washington's forces on October 19, 1781. The mighty British army, the best army in the world, had suffered defeat at the hands of a group of rebels.

Cornwallis returned to England where he continued to serve his country. He represented Great Britain as an **envoy** to Prussia, India, and Ireland. He died in 1805 while serving as Governor-General of India.

Name \_\_\_\_\_



Date \_\_\_\_\_

General Charles Cornwallis

## Questions

---

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. Charles Cornwallis was a native American.

- A. True
- B. False

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. What was Cornwallis' first rank in the British military?

- A. Private
- B. Lieutenant General
- C. Major General
- D. Ensign

3. Who did the Whig Party support in the disagreement between the colonies and the king?

---

---

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. Serving in the colonies was Cornwallis' first assignment in the military.

- A. True
- B. False

5. What incidents kept Cornwallis and the British army from winning the war in the early months?

---

---

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. When Cornwallis returned to the colonies in 1779, where had the battle sites shifted to?

- A. The East
- B. The South
- C. The North
- D. The West

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. Where did the end of the Revolutionary War take place?

- A. Cowpens
- B. Yorktown
- C. Philadelphia
- D. Boston

8. What kind of reception do you think Cornwallis might have received when he returned to England after the war?

---

---



Date \_\_\_\_\_

[illegible]

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.